

Arnošt Veselý and Martin Nekola (eds.) The Analysis and Creation of Public Policies: Approaches, Methods and Praxis
SLON, Prague, 2007, 407 pages.

SLON has published a textbook entitled *Analysis and Production of Public Policies: Approaches, Methods and Praxis*, edited by Arnošt Veselý and Martin Nekola. There are fourteen chapters, written by members of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University: Zuzana Drhová, Jaroslav Kalous, Marta Nachtmannová, Pavel Nováček, František Ochrana, Hana Paterová and the editors.

This book is a follow up to the first textbook on public policy in Czech, *Public Policy* (SLON, 2005), written by a similar group of people and edited by Martin Potůček. It deals specifically with the processes and methods of public policy analysis. It is meant for „everyone who analyses and creates public policies and looks for a stimulus for an improvement of his or her work... for experts, administrative officials, students and the broader public – in short, for anybody who does not regard politics only as a struggle for power and as a means of enforcing a certain ideology and who thinks that it can also be approached thoughtfully and systematically.“ (p.7)

This extensive, four-hundred page long text consists of two parts. The first, comprising five chapters, deals with the basics of an analysis and creation of public policies. The first two chapters – *Public Policy* and *Theoretical Knowledge on the Creation of Public Policies* – form a general framework for the rest of the textbook and briefly introduce the main concepts of public policy. Although this part is only fifty pages long, the concepts are presented comprehensively and not too simplistically. The next three chapters focus on practical aspects of policy making. The chapter *Practical Approaches to the Analysis and Creation of Public Policies* interprets policy making from a process perspective and both *Pivotal Skills of a Public Policy Analysts* and *Ethical Aspects of the Analysis and Creation of Public Policies* discuss the necessary skills and personal challenges which the analyst will face. The section on pivotal skills suffers from an attempt to condense too much into a short text, but its introductory part can be evaluated positively.

The second part represents the real core of the textbook. It focuses on the specific methods used in the analysis and creation of public policies. It begins with the chapter *Methods and Methodology in the Analysis and Creation of Public Policies*. It is a well chosen topic and a good-quality, although short text. What follows, *Data Collection and Analysis* and *Analysis and Definition of a Problem*, is very well structured, clearly explained and gives the reader a basis for the handling of public policy issues. *Goal Setting and Evaluative Criteria* can be also considered a fairly good chapter even though its focus on detail comes at the expense of making a complex overview. A similar shortcoming can be identified in *Identification of Variants of Public Policy Problems Solutions* which provides only an incomplete overview, focused on brainstorming-techniques for potential solution strategies.

Public Policy Forecasting reflects the author's specialisation. Forecasting methods do not necessarily belong among the basic methods for the creation of public policies, but their inclusion in the textbook provides an outline of these methods by the scholars who know them best within the Czech and Slovak Republics.

The last three chapters focus on the acceptance, realization and evaluation of public policies. It includes *Evaluation of Variant Policies* (well-written and organized), *Acceptation and Implementation of Public Policy* (too brief), and finally, the very comprehensive *Monitoring and Evaluation of Implemented Policies*.

As an editor of a similar textbook on public policy in Slovakia (Beblavý 2002), I am well aware of all the challenges that authors have to face when trying to write a lucid text about the very complex processes of analysis and creation of public policy for students and lay people. Nevertheless, it is possible to conclude that the textbook has sufficient extent and depth despite the fact that in some cases the chapters are too brief to serve as an informed guide through the topic of public policy. The authors tried to avoid expert terminology and thus the text became accessible for the broader public, supposing the reader's strong motivation and certain educational background.

Regarding the significance of the textbook, the authors themselves say that “despite the abundant amount of foreign literature on this topic, these texts usually remain inaccessible to Czech readers. Moreover, the possibility for applying knowledge and procedures acquired in the Anglo-Saxon context is

rather limited.” (p. 9) Therefore it was their explicit goal “to respect the particularities of the Czech context and to approach the foreign literature critically.” (ibid)

It is appropriate to ask: To what extent is the content of the textbook “Czechized”? We can appreciate the attempt to grasp original English terminology in Czech, as well as an emphasis not only on literature in English but also in Czech and Slovak. However, the examples and the application of these concepts were seldom transferred into the circumstances of an internal Czech reality.

When evaluating a textbook like this one, another important question to be discussed is related to a balance of topics. This question can be answered from two points of view.

The first is related to the overall orientation of the textbook. It is necessary to say that the book is focused mainly on a technocratic point of view and contains relatively little information on the politics of public policy. Consequently, the textbook is rather normative: it does not deal very much with a real public policy making in praxis. It is necessary to acknowledge that this kind of approach is in accordance with a credo at the beginning proclaiming that the book is mainly for those who believe that public policy is more than politics. However, the almost complete removal of politics from the study of public policy has resulted in an overly academic style.

On the other hand, within the chosen framework, the topic has been thoroughly dealt with and the textbook provides an excellent overview of the foreign literature, primarily emphasizing academic resources. The second part of the book is the most valuable for students, especially the chapters *Methods and Methodology in the Analysis and Creation of Public Policies*, *Data Collection and Analysis*, *Analysis and Definition of a Problem*, *Public Policy Forecasting*, *Evaluation of Variant Policies*, and *Monitoring and Evaluation of Implemented Policies*. I recommend this textbook not only to students of public policy but also to those students of political science, public administration, or economy who are interested in the governance of public affairs and in the specific contribution that can be made by public policy in this regard.

REFERENCES

BEBLAVÝ, M. (ed.), 2002: *Manuál pre tvorbu verejnej politiky (A Handbook for Public Policy Making)*. SGI, Bratislava.

Miroslav Beblavý